2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

CHAPTER III

THE COMPOSITION OF MODERN CHIEFDOMS

Chiefdoms in the Administrative Mould

No less than in MacDonald's time, modern chiefdoms are in the first place organizations of villages. Physically, the villages consist of solid pole and daub huts of varying sizes. Some huts are rectangular, twenty feet long and fifteen feet wide, with glass windows, panelled doors, and thatched roofs. Others are small and round, about eight feet in diameter. There is also a considerable variation in the compactness of villages: often the huts are only a few yards apart, but sometimes at least a hundred yards or more. Most villages, however, could be circumscribed by a circle of a quarter-mile diameter, though, of course, there are many exceptions. There is a slight tendency for the village to spread itself along a path, in a way faintly suggesting ribbon development, but on the whole there is no particular physical pattern to the Yao village. In fact, though most villages have fairly distinct physical boundaries, and are definitely discrete clusters of huts, some are difficult to identify in this way. To the minds of the local people, however, the village is quite clear and distinct. This is because they see the village primarily as a social unit, and tend to impute into physical boundaries more definition than actually exists. It is in the social sense that I use the word here: the 'village' is a spatial group which recognizes its identity against similar groups.

The importance of the village in Yao structure can hardly be over-emphasized. Membership of a village provides the first index whereby people determine a stranger's background. If, after village membership is fixed, no other links can be found with a stranger, such as distant kinship, the relationship will remain at that level. A gossip identifies the person about whom he is speaking by giving his or her name and the name of his or her village. He says, 'Bi.[1] Mwana of Cigwaja village'.

[1] I use this abbreviation for the Arabic 'binti', 'daughter of'. Bini, pronounced 'bini' by the Yao, with Ali and Wali, 'son of', appear commonly in Yao names.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

The chief identifies a man who comes to see him in exactly the same way, and the Administration has adopted a similar system, except that it has its own definition of the village. During the initiation ceremonies, the initiands[1] are housed in long grass sheds which are subdivided into sections. Each section or room of the long shed-houses the boys or girls from one village. If villages share a burial ground, they have allotted portions where they bury their dead separately. In these and many other ways the village is looked upon by the Yao as a distinct unit in the chiefdom.

The chiefdom in the old days was distinctly a territorial unit and all the villages within that area recognized the superiority of the chief. The boundaries of the old chiefdoms were marked by rivers and hills and fixed after conquest and agreement. They are still well remembered. Modern chiefdoms are defined in their limits partly by Government decree and partly by custom. When Principal Headmen were appointed, the districts under them were demarcated with 'due regard being given to the composition of the Native population'. The traditional areas under the various chiefs, therefore, were recognized by the Administration as districts, so that the districts or their sections almost coincided with the chiefdoms. Some disputes between chiefs over boundaries have occurred from time to time and the Administration has had to arbitrate. For example, the Provincial Commissioner of the Southern Province reported a difference between Liwonde and Kawinga in 1936,[2] but through time these differences have been eliminated.

Traditional and Administrative boundaries do not coincide in a few places, for two reasons. Firstly, the Administration has accepted an obvious and physical boundary in preference to an indistinct and social boundary. It has taken the Domasi River as the boundary between Ntumanje and Mposa, though in fact a few villages under Mbela, Kawinga III's son, live on the south side of the river, and fall for Administrative purposes in Ntumanje's area. Mbela is still very strongly associated with Kawinga in ritual and kinship matters. His dealings with the

[1] I am grateful to Prof. Schapera for suggesting this word for those who are undergoing initiation ceremonies. The parallel is with graduands, i.e. those who are undergoing graduation ceremonies.

[2] *Report of the Provincial Commissioner, Southern Province* (1936), 20.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

Mapata's installation ceremonies. When an important headman succeeds, however, the chief himself usually makes a short appearance and talks to the people. When Nyenje was installed in July 1947, Kawinga attended. Nyenje has the same clan-name as Kawinga and is an Invader. In 1947, he had 109 tax-payers under him; he held rights to both initiation ceremonies, but he did not have the right to wear the scarlet headband. Kawinga arrived at 11.18 a.m. before Nyenje had come out of the hut and he went straight to it and entered. He emerged at 11.45 and sat on a chair under a drying stand. Kangomba, his head *ndunu*, came and sat with him. In the meantime the new headman was brought outside and seated on a chair. Sitting on either side of him on the mat on which his chair was placed, were his two wives. Nsanama,[1] a minor village headman of the same clan-name as Nyenje, officiated. The penny-giving now started. At 12.10 Kawinga got up and walked over to the crowd, and silenced them with a sharp whistle. They gathered round to hear his speech. He pointed out that the dispute about the succession to their headmanship had been going on for three or four years and that there had been two candidates, one of whom he had selected as successor because he knew he would be sensible and wise, and would look after his people in the village and in the smaller villages under him. He said that he had recommended this man to the District Commissioner who, with the Governor's sanction, had supported him. He did not therefore want to hear that the man had fallen ill; he dealt strictly with sorcerers. He said that respect started with the relatives: brothers and sisters, the husbands and the boys and girls must also respect 'the chief'. They must not mention his name but refer to him as 'the chief'. Kawinga went on to say that some husbands were evil and could split a village like this one, by telling lies to the headman and falsely advising the headman that his sisters were talking behind his back and insulting him. When he hears this he may break the village by ill-treating his relatives, thereby causing them to migrate and leave him all alone. Kawinga told the people not to go talking in other villages about the man who was in the chair; that sort of behaviour only led to sorcery. Finally, he warned them to help the headman in obeying the instructions of the White people who

[1] Not Kawinga's relatives of the same name.

against all evils — witchcraft, attack by lions, etc. The elsewusi then set about building shelters in which the unki will remain during their term of instruction. According to the number of the unki or the number of places where shelters are built may vary from one, two or three, to as many as eight. Each of these places is called *N'dapale*. They may be many miles apart and are so placed for the convenience of the mothers in various groups of villages who bring the food daily to the group of boys from those villages.

The boys when they originally left the village were wearing a large bark-cloth covering, with beads and miles, which latter articles have been taken by the m'winiko and his assistants. At *N'dapale* they wear simply a loin-cloth of bark.

During their stay at *N'dapale*, the unki are given animal names by the elsewusi who carry on the instruction of the boys until their return to *Luperule*, the m'winiko having gone back to his village immediately after the circumcision. The names given to the boys are commonly names of beasts of prey such as Alikale (*likale* = the jackal), Achiwesi (*chiwesi* = the leopard), etc.

Certain restrictions as to diet are laid upon the unki by the m'winiko, e.g. no meat of an animal killed by a beast of prey, no mushlah, *kinondale*. He will not allow any villager to visit *N'dapale* after sunset, i.e. and visitors may only be men who have been through the ceremony. An uncircumcised man is called *mkalale*, one who has not been to his *Unyago*.

Other restrictions as to foodstuffs may be made by the elsewusi, generally in connection with the mythical origin of such food substances. A finger-shaped yam called *liyata* is taboo, as it is said to have first sprung from the grave of a leper, the inference being obvious. After the *Unyago*, the boys have to undergo a special doctoring before they may partake of them. Bananas and rice are absolutely refused them, the latter on account of a story to the effect that rice grew from the scrotum of a dead man, the idea doubtless having relation to the resemblance of rice grains to maggots. Fish is denied them by some members of some tribes, as it is said to have originated from the finger of a woman which she threw away while bathing.

Each m'winiko may have special observances of his own. One near Zomba caused all cassava to be roasted in a certain way. Rows of pieces of cassava were placed in split bamboo splits and so roasted before the fire in the manner of fish. If roasted in the ordinary way, the cassava would split and show the white floury material inside, signified by the verb *ku-lapala*. If this is eaten by the unki, it is said that the preputial wound would reopen.

The length of time spent at *N'dapale* varies from four weeks to as long as three or four months. In the first place they must wait till the circumcision wounds of all are completely healed. Delay may be occasioned by complications having arisen in some case. Again, permission to return may be withheld by the chief for some reason or other. Should one of the unki die at *N'dapale*, the body is buried out in the bush and nothing is said to the parents until after the ceremonies are over and all have returned to the village.

3: Stanner D-5 (ca. 1912) 1932 FT7 Tao FT7

The *mali* then remain for about a month under the care of their guardians, during which time they receive most valuable instruction as to their behavior to others, especially to their elders and to members of the opposite sex. Their faults are brought home to them and many little pieces of advice given. They are taught the household duties which will be their lot thenceforth and they are forewarned of approaching puberty and what it means to them.

During this period their child-names are not used and until their new names are assigned to them, they are called after birds and animals, generally some of the smaller animals, e.g. Anyingalwa (*nyingalwa* = the shrew rat), Alitawala (*litawala* = a big species of rat), Analyalya (*nyalyalya* = the shrew). I have been unable to ascertain whether these have any totemistic significance.

The girls are usually given a fright to impress on them the danger of lions; one night an imitation of a lion approaching their enclosure is made when all is dark; then all of a sudden one of the elders armed with big thorns instead of claws will spring upon one of the girls, generally picking out the worst behaved.

When the term of instruction is completed, they again adjourn to *Chipata* for two days where *Dayaga* is danced on the first night by women, on the second night by men. The first day is spent by a party of men and women in the bush, preparing figures of animals and their dress for the dance. The women wear a small garment of bark-cloth called *matako-pelele*, a word which literally means "buttocks of a frog" but which is used with the meaning of trousers and refers in this case to the fact that the bark-cloth is sewn round the upper part of each thigh into a garment like a pair of knickerbockers. Round the abdomen and chest are worn bands made of short pieces of small, decorticated millet stalks; similar bands are worn on the legs and arms, two on each thigh, two on the leg, one at the wrist, below the elbow, and one round the upper arm. In the dark these give the body the appearance of being painted in alternate bands of black and white. They also wear a headdress of the same material.

On the first evening of the return to *Chipata*, this party of women appears after dark; they dance in a row, advancing and retiring in step, swinging their arms and moving their bodies to exclamations of *Hi-ki! Hi-ki!* Other women dress up as men, wearing long beards made of *likanga*, a kind of lime plant.

The second night, the representations of animals made of grass and bamboo framework supported by men appear, the elephant, the rhinoceros, and various antelopes being the common figures, also the zebra, made of painted bark cloth. These animal figures are similar to the *ningwe* or *ningwi* of the *Anyanja* and to those of the *Awisa*,[1] but the *nambwa* is unknown among the Tao.

During all these presentations at *Chipata*, the *mali* remind on mats are the chief spectators and are duly frightened by the performances of the last two days.

[1] Stanner, 'Notes on some tribes of British Central Africa' op. cit., p. 296.

4: Stannus D-5 (ca. 1909)1910 FT7 Yao FT7 Marav FR4

CIRCUMCISION AND INITIATION CEREMONIES.

Y 304 M [304] Circumcision was not practised among *Anyanja*. Among Amangoche, Mashinga and Yao, the practice was known as *Isyago wa lupanda*.

Ku-ombola lupanda:—the prepuce was drawn forward and a nick made on the right side of the median line near the frenum. An application mixed with oil was applied. At the present time the Mohammedan practice is common *Ku-ombola jando*:—the prepuce is drawn forward through a split piece of bamboo and cut off with a sharp knife.

Circumcision is performed on boys usually at the age of nine to twelve years by a medicine man called *Ngoliwa*, an honourable calling, in a hut at the Isyago camp. Both patient and operator stand, unless the former is young, when he sits. The ceremony is witnessed only by the boy's friend. Among Mohammedans clitoridectomy used to be performed by a woman operator (*nakenge*), but, it is said, was discontinued, on account of the heavy mortality, about seven years ago. At the time of the operation a woman was given medicine to make her vomit all unlawful things she might have eaten.

Y 304 981 Initiation ceremonies (including circumcision) take place at irregular intervals. The chief or headman settles the date at which the Isyago shall be held, generally once a year in July, when there is no work and little else to do. Boys who are considered ready will then take part. The elder brother or a friend of a boy settles whether he is ready for circumcision. The mother then takes a present to the chief. The boys, their friends and the medicine men then depart for the bush, sometimes a couple of miles away from the village. The number may vary from three or four to as many as thirty or forty. In the bush grass huts (= *mzasa*) are erected for their shelter. Food is brought by the mothers and deposited a little way from the camp, and the friends who have accompanied the boys fetch and carry and act as sentinels to prevent approach of any "outsiders." Six months used to be spent in the bush, now four to eight weeks only, and all the circumcision wounds must be healed by the time of the candidates' return. If a boy die, the mother is not informed, she is allowed to bring food each day; at the end when the return is made enquiring she is told by one of the men.

Y [947] The exit from the village is accompanied by the friends dancing *Tawgi* or *Mawere*, the boys in old calico (formerly always in bark cloth) walk and sit down on arrival at the place appointed. The circumcision is performed the following day; during the time which follows instruction is given them on their duties in after life as men, in good behaviour in their married life, *re* coitus, eating of food, superstitious regarding salt, etc. When this is all over a message is sent to the village, and the youths, walking quietly dressed in new cloths, are met half-way by the women and girls, who dance and sing; after the return to the village there is Y 551 981 [934] drinking and dancing, the newly initiated remaining for one day. At the present time the youth probably has some "friend" of the opposite sex with whom he sleeps; until he has had coitus he may not eat food into which salt has been put. His

4: Stanmus D-5 (ca. 1909) 1910 FT7 Yao FT7
Bemba FQ5

mother is very careful about this in preparing his food lest he die in consequence. He henceforth bears his man's name, and it is an insult to use his child's name again.

Initiation of girls takes place in much the same way, instruction being given by the old women. After initiation most girls wear a string of big blue beads round the neck. In some cases, where it is not convenient to go far into the bush, a patch of bush near the village may be selected, the approaches are carefully guarded, and pieces of calico on bamboos are used as flags to mark the place.

Namondi ceremony witnessed at Kasanka's village (Awisa tribe) August 30th, 1907:—A girl about fourteen years of age, well developed. Among the Awisa the initiation ceremony takes place when the girl has reached puberty and is ready to be married. Four days are spent by the candidate in a small grass hut built in the middle of the *bwalo* (or village open space), when instruction is given her in all her future duties by a woman who is her "friend," in this case a woman of about twenty-six years of age.

About mid-day of the fourth day she was brought into the *bwalo* wearing old calico round the waist, and with two friends, one on either side, danced a kind of shuffling step backwards and forwards to the time of four drums; it was witnessed by the women of the village, who occasionally joined in the dance. After this she retired, and later in the afternoon reappeared with blue calico from waist as far as knees, white calico tied round waist as a sash, a rope of blue beads round neck and under arms. On the head she wore an erection made of flour and water with a

FIG. 1.

central crest into which were stuck little pieces of reed, lines of red were painted on the white ground as shown in sketch. Always supported by her "friend" or "sponsor," she again danced for a few minutes and then departed.

This night about twelve midnight *Ziwere* was to be danced; all the evening and up till midnight a boy went round and round the village calling in a shrill voice warning none to approach. It was a very dark moonless night, and to the beating of seven drums (four small, two medium sized, one big) the *Ziwere* came into the *bwalo*. One was an elephant 8 feet high with a man in each pair of legs—made of grass, trunk and tusks complete; the other, called an *Nsembo* (a small antelope) resembled a dwarf jack-in-the-green more than anything else. The elephant pranced, the *Nsembo* spun round and round; each was attended by a man with a

6: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1947) 1949 FT7 Yao FT7

Often there is some cultural obstruction to the giving of information of certain types. The Yao, for example, will not readily mention the names of deceased persons. Often young children or people who themselves had no children are completely forgotten. Many polygynous men cannot remember the number of children that they have fathered.

Nevertheless, in spite of these and other similar difficulties, some investigators have been able to publish a certain amount of material bearing on the problem of the rate of increase of non-literate populations in Africa. All of them have been based on samples, though none of these could be considered statistically representative. Such studies in recent years include one in Southern Nigeria,[1] one from Tanganyika[2] based on a substantial sample of women, while M. Fortes has published some material on the Tallensi of the Gold Coast.[3] Schapera, incidentally to a larger study, has published some material on the Tswana of Bechuanaland Protectorate.[4]

The analysis of the Yakö by Enid Charles and C. Daryll Forde was mainly concerned with the calculation of the male net reproduction-rate, while the Culwicks and Schapera calculated female net reproduction-rates. Fortes considered both the male and female net reproduction-rates. The Culwicks have so far presented the most complete analysis of this type of material but were not able to classify their material into five- or ten-year age-groups, though they did use a wider age classification. The Culwicks, Fortes, and Schapera have all used the number of girls born to women now past child-bearing as an estimate of the female gross reproduction-rate. There are objections to this procedure which are outlined below.

In this paper an attempt is made to present in more detail some demographic material on an African non-literate people. The main object of the paper is to estimate the probable gross and net reproduction-rates prevailing at the moment in the areas studied. The data on which this paper is based were collected incidentally to a study of the social organization of the Yao people living in the Liwonde District of Nyasaland in Central Africa.[5] In this study a number of typical hamlets, varying from 5 to 50 or more dwellings, were visited and genealogies of the residents recorded. In 20 of these hamlets further details were secured on points of demographic interest. Each census in a village took a day or two, and individual censuses were taken between November 1946 and March 1947. In this analysis of the material I have assumed that the survey was done at the end of 1946. The survey was conducted on a *de facto* and *de jure* basis in that the population who had slept in a hamlet the previous night was enumerated, but the mobility of the population is so high that usually it was necessary to consider a *de jure* count as constituting the true population of the village. The twenty hamlets studied were grouped in three areas, two in the area under N. A. Kawinga and one in N. A. Nyambi's area.

[1] Enid Charles and C. Daryll Forde, 'Notes on Some Population Data from a Southern Nigerian Village', *The Sociological Review*, vol. xxx, no. 1 (April 1938).

[2] A. T. and G. M. Culwick, 'A Study of Population in Ulanga, Tanganyika Territory', *The Sociological Review*, vol. xxx, no. 4 (1938), p. 363, and vol. xxxii (1939), no. 1, p. 23.

[3] M. Fortes, 'A Note on the Fertility among the Tallensi of the Gold Coast', *The Sociological Review*, vol. xxxv, no. 1–3 (July–Oct. 1943).

[4] I. Schapera, *Migrant Labour and Tribal Life*, London: Oxford University Press (1947), pp. 20 ff.

[5] This study was conducted as part of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute's comparative study of the social organization of some Central African tribes. I am grateful to the Trustees of the Institute and to the Director, Dr. E. Colson, who have given me permission to publish this material.

181 Amasiningo in the Makanjila area of Fort Johnston District, i.e. to the east of the south end of
619 the Lake near Fort Maguire. These two divisions
175 are insignificant when compared with the other
643 two divisions in Nyasaland. The third division is the Mangoce Yao now settled around Blantyre, while the last division, the Macinga, are settled between Fort Johnston district and Zomba. These divisions arose from a breaking up of the Yao tribe which originally occupied the territory between the Rovuma and Lujenda Rivers in what is now Portuguese East Africa. These divisions are not very significant to-day. Members of a division recognize that they are more closely related to each other than to the members of another division, but this does not appear to affect modern political life in any way.

619 The first Kawinga, Liwonde and Nkata[1]
175 all belonged to the Macinga division which had
● 551 settled near the tip of Lake Amaramba where it
643 empties into the Lujenda River. From this place of origin, the groups associated with these early leaders moved into Nyasaland. In addition to belonging to the same division of the Yao tribe the three leaders mentioned also had the same clan-name, viz. *undewe*.[2] The term that I have translated as clan-name is the Yao word *fukuya*, which may also be translated as "kind" or "sort". Thus, if one asks a man the "kind" or "sort" of Yao he is, his answer may refer to the major divisions as above, i.e. Macinga or Mangoce or it may refer to the clan-name. Clan-names are inherited matrilineally, but holders of the same name are unable to trace their descent from a common ancestor. People with the same clan-
[582] names formerly did not marry but this prohibition has fallen away. For the commoners the clan-name seems to have lost most of its significance but it is carefully remembered in the royal lines and lines in which the rank of a village headman is passed down.

643 The present Kawinga and the present Liwonde
551 can trace their descent matrilineally from a com-
175

R.Mitchell E-5 (1945-1947) 1949
[P.146B] FT7 Tao FT7

643 mon ancestress. The first Kawinga and the first
551 Liwonde were maternal brothers and to this day
175 Kawinga and Liwonde call each other "brother".
[601] Nyambi however was a sister's son of an early leader Mkumba who was the father of Nkata, and their clan-name was *amalui*. Nkata therefore called Nyambi "father". [9] Nkata was the first to move into Nyasaland and Mkumba and Nyambi followed afterwards. Later the Nkata name was dropped and an Arabic name Zarafi, corrupted to Jalasi, was substituted. Hence the present Jalasi calls the present Nyambi "father". Kawinga and Liwonde both call Nyambi *akamu*, or brother-in-law, it is said because one of the early Nyambi's married a woman who bore the clan-name of *amkwas*.

643 The groups under Kawinga and Nkata entered
175 Nyasaland and gradually expanded until Jalasi,
648 as he became known, dominated the area around Mount Mangoce in the present Fort Johnston District, and Kawinga, safely ensconced on Mount Chiala, dominated most of the area north of this point. Jalasi, Kawinga and Liwonde were heavily defeated by British forces in 1895-6 and driven out of British Territory. Later on they were allowed to return after they had been ordered to surrender and effectively disarmed. When they had returned, the chiefs were virtually ignored and so far as can be ascertained the effect of the British government was to destroy the power of the chiefs and substitute the system of British administration for theirs. Nevertheless, it is apparent from entries in the District Book that even though it were not the official policy, the administering officers considered it important that the chiefs should maintain some power. Thus when Kawinga III died in August 1905 the District Book records: "There were two claimants to the succession, Kambombo and Chiwale. Their claims were really very equal and H. M. Commissioner (April 1906) called in Kambombo and the more important headmen and decided the succession by their vote." The

8:Mitchell E-5 (1946-1947) 1949 FT7 Yao FT7
[P.146C]

643
551

[illegible]

[illegible]